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Pro-Soviet Press in India Mounts Propaganda Drive Against U.S.

By William Claiborne
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NEW DELHI, Feb. 16—In an apparent attempt to heat up Third World animosity against the United States before the start of the summit of the Nonaligned Movement here next month, the Soviet-supported Communist press in India has escalated a disinformation campaign based on a purported State Department document, according to U.S. officials.

The centerpiece of the propaganda campaign, U.S. officials said, is an apparently fake document in which the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, is purported to have spelled out a blueprint for covert U.S. operations to "Balkanize" India and foster divisions in the Third World.

The campaign has been led by the Communist Party of India daily, The Patriot, but has been picked up by a number of leftist newspapers here and has been directed to other developing countries.

Expanding on the theme, the Communist and leftist press here has accused the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency of helping to engineer Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's ruling Congress (I) Party defeats by regional parties in two southern states, and has resuscitated old charges of alleged CIA backing of insurgent forces in Tripura and other far northeastern states.

U.S. officials say the press campaign has followed a "classic" pattern of Soviet disinformation campaigns in other parts of the world.

So far, the Indian government, which has close economic and military ties to the Soviet Union, has reacted cautiously to the allegations about Kirkpatrick, saying only that it has instructed its embassy in Washington to check the veracity of the reports.

While a foreign affairs consultative committee of Parliament has discussed the authenticity and potential implications of the charges at length in a closed-door meeting, Indian officials said they are skeptical enough to want to wait for a thorough investigation before commenting publicly.

Similarly, the moderate Indian press has been relatively restrained in its coverage of the Communist allegations.

Because the Indian Parliament is in recess, discussion of the allegations there has been confined to a joint statement by five Communist members condemning the purported Kirkpatrick document. However, a floor discussion on the affair is expected after the session resumes on Friday, two weeks before the start of the seventh nonaligned summit here.

The United States is used to being buffeted at nonaligned summits, and U.S. officials have said they expect strident attacks during this summit on such issues as U.S. involvement in Central America and U.S. Middle East policy. Similarly, the Soviet Union is certain to be the object of spirited debate over the intervention in Afghanistan.

But senior U.S. officials have said they are relieved to have the leadership of the Nonaligned Movement shift from Cuba to India for the next three years, particularly in light of the recent thawing of U.S.-Indian relations following Gandhi's visit to Washington last summer.

As chairman of the Nonaligned Movement, India is responsible for drafting working resolutions that will be debated during the summit. Preliminary drafts already being circulated among delegates underscore the issue of nuclear proliferation by both superpowers, as well as regional issues involving the United States and the Soviet Union.

Whether or not Third World resentment over the purported Kirkpatrick blueprint materializes at the nonaligned summit, the unfolding of the story in the Indian and Soviet press offers an insight into the mechanics of disinformation.

The first of a series of articles bannerizing the U.S. plot to "Balkanize" India and foment Third World divisions appeared Jan. 25 in The Patriot, one of several major national newspapers that receives substantial advertising from the Soviet Embassy Information Department. Although identified with the Communist Party, it is regarded as a serious newspaper with wide national news coverage.

The article asserted that after Kirkpatrick made a tour of the Subcontinent in August 1981, she wrote a report circulated among all principal U.S. posts abroad "for limited official use."

The report allegedly noted a growth of separatist movements in India's states and said there is a "real possibility of the Balkanization of India, which would destroy its influence in the Third World and elsewhere." Such a development, Kirkpatrick was quoted as saying, "would undoubtedly seriously damage the interest of the Soviet Union, a traditional front of neutralist India."

Kirkpatrick was also quoted in the alleged document as identifying 11 Third World countries that were to be "isolated, restrained or set against one another." India was among them.

Kirkpatrick, in a statement issued by the U.S. Embassy here the next day, called the charge "pure and malicious disinformation, a total fabrication. I have never written a paper on 'Balkanization' or any even remotely related subject."